

Interviewee: Walter Miller

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 29 July 2004

Location: by telephone to the Miller residence in Hibbing, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, September 2004

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2005

Walter Miller was born 24 May 1919 in Hibbing, on Minnesota's Iron Range, one of four children. He grew up there, and attended Hibbing High School.

In January of 1941, Walter volunteered for the US Army, and after completing Basic Training was assigned to the 60th Coast Artillery, then stationed in the Philippines. When the Pacific War began in December of 1941, he was stationed on the island of Corregidor, in Manila Bay.

US forces on Corregidor surrendered to the Japanese in May 1942, and Walter was among the thousands of men now POWs of the Japanese.

Walter's POW odyssey, May 1942 – September 1945

(information checked with various publications and records)

1. captured on Corregidor, May 1942
2. 92nd Garage, on Corregidor, May 1942
3. Cabanatuan Camp 3, June – October 1942
4. Freighter *Tottori Maru* (6 October 1942), prisoner transport from Manila to Pusan, Korea (arr 9 November 1942)
5. Mukden, Manchuria, several POW camp locations, November 1942 – August 1945
6. Soviet troops liberate Manchuria POW camps, August 1945

Walter and other American POWs were evacuated to Okinawa, then by ship to the United States. He spent months recovering from his time as a POW, before being discharged in early 1946.

Again a civilian, Walter got married in 1946 (wife Margaret) and helped to raise two boys. He returned to Hibbing and worked for Shubat Transportation Company, and also Hibbing School District, before retiring in 1989.

Walter Miller died on 21 January 2010, at age ninety.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

W = Walter Miller

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is Thursday, 29 July 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm interviewing Mr. Walter Miller, of Hibbing, Minnesota, and this interview is being conducted by telephone. First, Mr. Miller, on the record, thanks very much for taking time this morning to speak with me.

W: Yes.

T: For the record, you were born on 24 May 1919 up on the Iron Range, in Hibbing. You were one of four children, and had one brother and two sisters. You went to school in Hibbing. In January of 1941 you were inducted into the US Army as a volunteer and served that year with the 60th Coast Artillery with duty in the Philippine Islands. When the Pacific War began in December of 1941 you were stationed on the island of Corregidor.

Mr. Miller, that's where I want to pick up the story. I'm wondering, when the Pacific War began, and for you guys it was 8 December, what do you remember about the day that the war began?

W: It was December 8. They hit us at noon. Exactly at noon. They came in with planes and bombed us. They had been hammering us with the airplanes, oh, for a while. Two or three weeks. In the meantime, the Japanese Army was advancing in Bataan. That was across the bay from Corregidor and they surrendered. A lot of those soldiers came flying into Corregidor and we didn't have that good of a food supply to accommodate what was on Corregidor and all the newcomers coming in. What happened, we fought about a month after Bataan fell and then we, our commander—General MacArthur was our commander, and he was a brave soldier. I can remember that, cripes, as if it happened yesterday. I was a truck driver and hauling water to the gun batteries. Are you familiar with Corregidor?

T: Yes, I am.

W: Okay. There's the Malinta tunnel there that divided the main island from what they called the Monkey Point, the narrows. He was standing there looking up in the air when I came by with the truck. I stopped and I saluted him, and I asked him, I said, "Are they close?" He said, "They sure are." I jumped in the ditch to take cover and he just stood there and he slowly walked into the tunnel. That was his headquarters at that time. He was a brave soldier.

T: So you saw General MacArthur kind of face to face there for that moment.

W: Oh, yes. I even talked to him about...are the planes coming and if they're close. I didn't hesitate and I didn't stand around very long to find out.

T: I imagine you wouldn't.

W: I left the truck and headed for the ditch. And boy, it was a matter of twenty seconds later the bombs were falling.

T: Let me ask you. When the Japanese attacked on 8 December, as you remember it, how much of a surprise was it that war actually came to the Pacific?

W: It was a big surprise. You couldn't believe it. We just couldn't believe it. We were at alert. We knew there was something coming up, but we weren't notified of anything. But we had to do a lot of extra practicing on guns and stuff like that. Whatever our job was. We suspected something was wrong.

T: So the day and the hour of the attack was a surprise, but the fact that something happened wasn't, really.

W: No. No. We knew something was coming. But the air raid was a big surprise to us because we weren't trained on what to do or a damn thing. I'll give you an example of that. It was noon and we were at the barracks, which was about three blocks from the garage. When the bombs started falling, one came right through the barracks and punched a hole you could put a battleship through it. Boy, then we took off for our positions.

T: Sure.

(1, A, 49)

W: Went to the garage with the rest of the company men that were on that duty, and we started pulling trucks out of the garage and we got two of them out. This garage was right next to the parade ground. There was a road at the end of the parade ground that went into the garage and further down to a corral. We got two new trucks in there. We just had them a short time. We backed them out of the garage. The garage got hit. We had gasoline and oil storage right at the end of the garage. The bomb hit this oil and gas station and we jumped out of the foxholes and were pulling out the...I mean, we left the barracks and ran to the garage and were pulling out these new trucks. We got two of them out there. We went in and got two more. And when we came out to park them behind the other two, we looked at them and you could see the grease leaking out of the differentials. They were full of holes. We're standing there looking at this and here comes the plane and he strafed the two trucks that we pulled out later and there we were, two of us right between the

fire. The bullets were hitting the truck and they just missed us on the other side. Boy, were we lucky! We thought it was shrapnel from our own guns falling and making all that dust on the street.

T: Was that the first time you'd been under fire like that, as it were?

W: Yes. Yes. First time.

T: What was that experience like as a young man of twenty-two years old?

W: Pretty scary. It was pretty scary. From that point on we just, both of us, dove in a foxhole. When I was diving in the foxhole I got shrapnel from a bomb and it peeled the skin off of my shins, and after I got into the foxhole a bomb hit nearby and a big chunk of dirt came and it hit the edge of the foxhole and hit me on the back. Hell, I couldn't straighten up for two months.

T: So you were slightly wounded there.

W: Yes.

T: Before the island actually fell.

W: Yes.

T: Let me move to the actual surrender of Corregidor. How much advance warning do you remember having as a soldier that the island was going to be surrendered?

W: None at all. We were all at our gun pits and before we know it...we could hear the battle. The Japanese came across the bay and invaded us. At Monkey Point. That was the narrow part of the island. We could hear all the firing and guns were going left and right. I wasn't near that spot. I was on the other side of Malinta Hill. Aircraft gun battery. It was Company C. I was transferred from Headquarters and a truck driver to a gun battery when this was all going on. We were getting hit and all of a sudden everything stopped. No action. And we didn't know what the heck to expect, and then we found out that General Wainwright, he was in command then, he surrendered us.

T: How do you remember taking the news that you were now going to be a prisoner of war? What did that mean to you?

W: Well, I don't know. We just kind of took things like that in stride. We just took what was handed to us and thought nothing of it. What else could we do?

T: So I hear you saying, kind of an acceptance of the situation the way it was.

W: Yes. See most of the soldiers at that time were, literally, were teenagers during the Great Depression. And we were all tough men. And that's why World War II was won by people like myself.

T: How do you think growing up in northern Minnesota in the 1930s helped you out when you were a POW?

(1, A, 97)

W: Well, I'll tell you what we did. We all had gardens. I lived a little bit out of the city. We had big gardens. We grew our own potatoes, our own cabbage, all our own vegetables. We didn't have any money, but we never went hungry because at that time there was a lot of game, wild game. There was a lot of deer. There was a lot of partridge, grouse, and in the spring of year....and there was a lot of fish at that time, because those days very many people didn't have automobiles to travel and fish and hunt like they do today.

T: Do you think that growing up in that time made it easier for you to deal with being a prisoner of war too?

W: Absolutely. Absolutely.

T: Let me ask now. When the island was surrendered, do you remember being face to face with the Japanese for the first time?

W: Yes. Because we had to...we killed so many of them. I don't know how many it was. But we had to pull them off the beach and we had to stack them up by the tunnel. We had a stack of dead Japanese about the size of a one-story building, house with an attached garage. I would say there was about fifty foot long. These dead Japanese. And about twelve feet as high as we could reach and we even had men on top of them pulling soldiers up there.

T: This was after you had surrendered.

W: Right. Right.

T: So you were part of duty that had to collect the casualties, as it were, and collect them together and stack them.

W: Right.

T: What was done with those bodies? Were they burned? Were the bodies burned?

W: Not very many of them.

T: I mean, when they were all stacked up. Were the corpses...

W: Oh, they took their identification tags out, and they poured the gasoline on them and oil, and they burned the bodies.

T: Was doing that, was that difficult for you to do all that? Collect those bodies and all that?

W: No. No. Because we were taking care of our own at the same time. Before this happened. So it wasn't very hard to take.

T: What did you make of the Japanese when you have them...they're your captors now, and what did you make of those people? What kind of people were they?

W: I didn't think they were that bad. As a POW we had, oh, I would say about ninety percent of our guards in the Army, they were pretty decent. But still you had a few of those that didn't like us. They beat the hell out of us every chance they get. But most of them were pretty good.

At the end of the war, I was liberated by the Russians. These Japanese guards that were over us and they all came to our camp looking for [protection]...they didn't want to meet the Russians.

T: Almost for protection?

W: Yes. They came to our camp for protection.

Well, when the Russians came in there, they disarmed them. Gave us their arms and they didn't spend much time with us. All the guards that were mean, and officers that were mean, we marched them out of the gate and there was a road right alongside the wall. We told them, start running. There was about six or seven of them, and as they started running we shot them. Shot them dead. Then we were free to roam the city. But we took care of the bad ones.

T: Yes.

W: There was a Japanese doctor that was in California. I forget the town. But five years before the war started, the Japanese government sent him a letter and said he inherited some property in Japan. The only way he could accept it or sell it was to appear in person. He was telling me this.

(1, A, 152)

T: This was at Mukden?

W: That was at Mukden. Yes. They took this Japanese doctor as an interpreter, and he was our doctor. I had diphtheria, and when we got off the train they paraded us through the city there. We were off the train about eight thirty, nine o'clock, and we finally arrived at the camp about four and they divided all the prisoners in groups

and sent them to barracks. All those that were a little bit, needed medical attention, there was three barracks that they had set aside, 110 men.

I had diphtheria. I hadn't eaten in seven days. When the doctor came in there, this Japanese doctor that came from America, him and the American doctor that was taken prisoner, I was laying down on the—there were no beds. It was just a platform. Bamboo platform about a foot and a half off the dirt floor. I was laying down while all the others were standing at attention. They asked the guy next to me, "What's wrong with him?" I told them that I had a bad throat.

So they looked in my throat and they pulled me out of there and put me in isolation. The isolation ward was like a chicken coop. He came in there after dark and he gave me an injection. In the butt. This doctor. His name was Dr. Oke. Then he came in the next day at ten o'clock and he gave me another injection in the arm. On the eighth or ninth day I started eating again. In the meantime, there was nine other men that came into this, chicken coop we called it. I was the only one out. I was the only one that pulled out of that.

T: And the rest of them did not survive?

W: No. They died. The other nine died. I was the only one there. But I had to stay in quarantine for, I think it was thirty days. I was in this coop all by myself and they brought the food to me there. Finally the time was up, and I had to go to work with the rest of them.

T: So you were fortunate on more than one occasion to survive.

W: You bet.

T: Let me go back to Corregidor and ask you, when you first became a POW, if you were questioned or searched by the Japanese?

W: Yes. We were searched, but no questions. They just searched us for arms. Revolvers and stuff like that. Knives.

T: Right. Did you spend time at the 92nd Garage facility at Corregidor before you left the island?

W: Oh, sure. That was it.

T: What are your memories of the couple weeks that you spent there?

W: I don't think it was a couple weeks. It was more like a week. It was tough. The sun, it was 102, 103, and the sun was shining on you. No shade.

T: So no opportunity to get out of the sun.

W: The only thing we had was the water, the bay. We'd get so hot that we'd walk right into the water up to our necks with our clothes and all on. Then walk out. That was the only relief we had from the heat.

T: Was food being supplied at this time?

W: I can't remember ever getting a bite to eat when we were down on the 92nd Garage. I don't remember.

T: How did you leave there? Did you go from Corregidor across Manila Bay to the city of Manila?

W: Yes.

T: How did they take you there?

W: By boat. Freighter.

T: And when you got to Manila, how were you transported up to [Cabanatuan] Camp III?

(1, A, 205)

W: By railroad. There was one bridge that—the guys blew it up. They didn't like the Japs and there was a few of them that escaped from Bataan. They were blowing up things like that and running back into the jungles. They blew up this bridge on the way to Cabanatuan. Then we had to walk two days. I can remember spending one night in a school playground. Then we went the rest of the way to Camp III, Cabanatuan. That march was terrible.

T: Talk about that.

W: No water. The Japs around you, they found every reason they could to beat the hell out of you. They were seasoned battleground troops. They weren't what you call after the battle troops that take over.

T: Right.

W: They were battleground troops.

T: So they were not occupation troops, but combat troops.

W: Yes. But that was on the march. I remember very closely like it happened yesterday. A fellow from California and I were—we were all carrying the weak. Two guys, one on each side, and we were two blocks away from the camp gate. A Japanese guard came up and he hit me over the head with the butt of his rifle, and

my buddy, and he grabbed the guy that we were carrying, pulled him to the ditch and put the bayonet through his heart.

T: This is right in front of your eyes.

W: Right in front of the eyes. Yes. Of course, we had to keep marching, but we looked back and we saw what happened.

T: Sure. So you witnessed, you did witness, the killing of American prisoners or abusive treatment by Japanese guards on more than one occasion.

W: I did. This one here sticks out in my mind more than any.

T: How does that...can you describe how that affects you when you have to keep walking there? It sounds like a completely helpless position.

W: Yes. We were helpless. What are you going to do? You just keep marching and if you couldn't keep up they shoved a bayonet in your rear end. They were mean. I mean, they were mean. They were battleground troops. They weren't the other type.

T: How long was that march to Camp III, to Cabanatuan?

W: Two days for me. But Bataan it was eight or nine days.

T: It sounds like you were fortunate that it was only two days.

W: Yes.

T: When you got to Camp III, it must be about a month after you were captured now? Was it June?

W: Yes. About, well, a little more than a month. I think it was on Armistice Day. That falls on when?

T: That's 11 November [1942].

W: November. We got off the train on Armistice Day. In Mukden.

T: Yes. Let's talk about...let me ask you about Camp III, first of all. The time you spent at Camp III, because that was—was it about five or six months?

W: About that. Yes.

T: When you got to that facility, can you describe what that looked like? Start with the barracks, for example, or the housing that they had for you. What was that like?

W: (*chuckles*) Very, very simple. There was a lot of bamboo in that country and everything was made out of bamboo, and then the roofs were made out of straw. It's hard to believe, but they never leaked in the rain. The barracks were, well, dirt floors.

(1, A, 265)

T: Did they have walls on them, these buildings?

W: Oh, yes. They had walls.

T: Walls. Bamboo and then a thatched roof.

W: Yes. And they had openings on each end of the barracks. That's kind of a fuzzy...I can't picture that very well.

T: The barracks itself.

W: Yes.

T: Do you remember sleeping on the floor or on some kind of platforms?

W: It was a platform. Because it was a Filipino training camp that was abandoned.

T: So that being abandoned, they were able to use it to house POWs now.

W: Yes. Right.

T: What kind of work details do you remember being on there at Camp III?

W: The only one I can remember is the kitchen duty. We took turns to go out in the woods and chop wood for the kitchen. That was about it.

T: Were there any work details that you remember outside the camp? Any kind of agricultural labor?

W: No. No. Not while I was there.

T: The chopping wood for the kitchen, were you also part of preparing food?

W: No. No. They had cooks that were cooks in the Army. They went back to cooking in the prison camp. Regular cooks.

T: So you were part of gathering wood that was used for heating, for making fires.

W: Right.

T: Were there roll calls there, that you remember?

W: I don't remember. No.

T: How was your health at this time when you were at Camp III?

W: I was in good health. Except for the injuries that I suffered during the war. Had a lot of trouble with my back.

T: Did you have any problems with any of the, shall we say, typical tropical diseases at this time?

W: No. No. I had malaria, but that was during the war.

T: While you were still on Corregidor?

W: Yes.

T: What kind of food do you remember being supplied at Camp III?

W: At first it was rice. A poor grade of rice. There was a lot of dirt in it. And for every ten grains of rice there was a chuck worm about an inch long. You know, those white...well, for every ten grains of rice you had one of those worms. When we first got there we would take our spoons and throw the worms out. And then it got to the point that we just didn't look. We just covered them up and ate them for a while. Then it got to the point where you bet your bunk partner, I got more worms than you got. If I won the bet, I got his worms. At that time that was considered our dessert.

T: The worms.

(1, A, 320)

W: Yes.

T: So the worms went from something you picked out of your food, to something you ate, to something you wanted.

W: Well, at first we picked them out. We couldn't stand it. But then when you're hungry, the worms taste good.

T: Was it possible to supplement that with anything that you could scrounge or grow at Camp III?

W: No. No. The only thing I can remember is rice in that camp. That was a poor grade. I was one of the first that got shipped out, on the *Tottori Maru*. I can remember today when the officers came and pulled us out of the barracks. We had to strip down to our socks, and these Japanese officers went by and they pointed out you, you, you. Step forward.

T: These are your own officers or Japanese?

W: Japanese officers. All the guys they picked out, those were the guys that they put on the boat and sent to Mukden.

T: How were they making that selection? Could you tell? How were the Japanese deciding who to take and who not to take?

W: That's why they stripped us. To see which men were in better physical condition. Those that were skinny, they were left behind.

T: So they were taking the people they perceived to be the healthiest.

W: Yes.

T: And of course, if you're stripped to your socks they can see what kind of shape you're in.

W: Yes. They stripped us. Underwear and all.

T: Did they tell you, or did you find out any information about where you were going?

W: No. No. We had no idea where we were going and we were on the boat, the *Tottori Maru*, for thirty-one days.

T: Yes. That was a long trip. Were there rumors among the men, that you remember, about what was going to happen? Before you left the camp. I mean, without any news, oftentimes we have rumors to fill the gap like that.

W: No. Not really. No. There wasn't rumors at all, but that boat that we were on, they hauled horses to somewhere in the Far East during the war. There was ton of manure in that damn boat and they didn't clear it up. We had to...well, in my case, I knew we were going to go on that boat because...

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: How did you get from Camp III to Manila where you got on the boat?

W: By train.

T: So they moved you from Camp III back to Manila, and then I think it was to Pier Seven in the Manila harbor?

W: That I don't know.

T: The record says Pier Seven. Let me ask you. You've described it was used for horses. Do you remember you and the men on the docks, do you remember getting on board that ship?

W: Yes.

T: Talk about that, because there were several holds on that ship, weren't there?

W: Yes. When we first got marched toward the ship I thought I was smart and I kind of worked my way to the end of the line. You know what they did? The Japanese marched us all past the gangplank, and then those that were last in line were the first ones going into the boat. So we were sent down to the bottom of the boat.

(1, B, 400)

T: I see. So you had to get in—did you climb down a ladder? Is that how it was done?

W: Yes. It was ladders going up. That's what it was. Yes. Because there was no mechanical equipment that we could be put on and be brought down there. And once we got there, oh, God! The horse manure smell was terrible. No ventilation. And we were down there for two days before they let us up on deck.

T: So they loaded all these men down in there.

W: Yes.

T: Can you estimate how many men were together in the hold that you were in?

W: Well, there was two or three holds. Now, it was pretty hard. There was standing room only. When we got off the boat I know for sure there was about 1500 of us.

T: That's right. That's what the record says. Now, those holds, do you remember being in one that was at the front, the middle or the back of the ship?

W: I was more in the front.

T: Talk about the conditions in the hold that you were in. As you were in there, what do you recall about that?

W: It was dark and there was one twenty-five watt bulb in there. There was no way that you could sit down because you were packed in there like sardines and you were standing on your feet. We slept that way.

T: Standing up.

W: Shoulder to shoulder in that boat. Standing up. I don't remember sitting down or bending down or anything else.

T: So you remember it being extremely crowded.

W: Right.

T: Packed in there very, very closely. Were there facilities, bathroom facilities, down in the hold at all?

W: No. If you had to go to the bathroom, you went right where you were standing up.

T: Was it possible, from your memory, to ever get up on deck?

W: Yes. After two days we were allowed up on deck. They let a certain amount up out of the hold onto the deck, and then they had toilet facilities on the top deck. They were just on the sides of the boat. You went to the toilet.

T: Like a wooden latrine kind of draped over the side of the deck?

W: Yes. It was a latrine right at the edge of the guardrails. Then they hosed it down off the boat.

T: The smell down there in the hold must have been unbearable.

W: Oh, it was. It was.

T: The ship was under way and stopping more than once. You spent the whole time in the same hold?

W: No. Once we got on deck there was no way that you went in the same place because it depends on where you were on deck. They'd come and grab—the Japs would take a certain amount and say, okay, back in the hold. I spent two days, but I was smart enough to figure out how to get out of there and get in the top hold.

T: How did you do that?

W: I just wiggled my way through the people. If I saw them...if we were out in front and they came and picked out so many people to be put in the hold, I'd work my way

as far away from the group that was going to leave into that hold. I was smart enough there (*chuckles*).

(1, B, 437)

T: It sounds like keeping your head on your shoulders was a good thing.

W: I did that. Yes.

T: What kind of food was supplied during the weeks that you were in this ship?

W: That I don't know. I can't remember. I think it was just rice.

T: So you don't have a clear recollection of what was provided or how often.

W: No. I have no recollection of that.

T: Did men die on board that ship?

W: Oh, yes. I can't remember how many there were, but there were quite a few that died. Our first stop was Okinawa and they pulled off the real sick ones that were ready to die. They took them off the boat in Okinawa and I have no idea how many. But then we proceeded further north towards Korea, and then there was another group that was taken to the hospital or something. They weren't put on the train. My closest buddy was one of those that got held behind.

T: Who was that?

W: John Bowles from New York.

T: And he didn't make it to Mukden.

W: No. He was taken off...he wasn't allowed on the train. He was taken and put in a hospital or whatever it was. I don't know. But he came up about a month or two later. That group came and met us at the camp.

T: So you were separated from him when you got off the ship at Pusan there, but he did come later.

W: Yes.

T: I see. Do you remember on board the ship ever worrying about being attacked by submarines or being attacked by submarines?

W: Oh, yes.

T: Talk about that.

W: On the second day out when they allowed us on deck, it was a beautiful day and the deck was just crowded with POWs. Nice and quiet. There wasn't a very rough sea. And all of a sudden a guy hollered, "Torpedoes!" And we all—you couldn't run to the other end of the ship because there was too many people there already.

T: So a lot of guys were on deck.

W: On deck. A lot of guys were on deck. This one guy that spotted it was pointing at it. The captain of the ship looked that way and he could see them coming. They were fizzled out. They were skipping the top of the waves.

T: Could you see them as well?

W: I saw them. Yes. Two of them. They were about twenty feet apart. The skipper of the ship, he turned the point of the boat toward the torpedoes and one went on each side of us. We were just damn lucky. We were lucky there.

T: Yes. That's again, beyond your control. Sort of hoping.

W: Right.

(1, B, 471)

T: Had the ship been torpedoed, that could have really been bad.

W: It would have. We would have all died. We were out in the middle of the Pacific and no other ships around. There wasn't a ship in sight.

T: Was your health...did you stay pretty healthy on board that ship still?

W: Yes. I was pretty healthy.

T: How was your back by this time?

W: That was the only thing that was bothering me.

T: So you still had problems with that months later.

W: Right. I had a problem with it on that trip. But, you know, sometimes there's something that's more important than your pain, and you forget it. Like those torpedoes coming, and how you're going to get a bite to eat, and stuff like that took your mind off the pain.

T: Right. So in a sense, the situation can make you forget certain problems.

W: Right. At that time, that was several months after I really got hit, and it was kind of healing. But I had a hard time straightening up.

T: Do you remember being under way in the ship, ever getting off the ship after you got on in Manila to when you got off in Pusan? Did you ever get off? Was the ship ever cleaned, that you remember?

W: No. No. The ship had mechanical problems and that's why we pulled in at Pusan...no, that island...

T: Formosa.

W: Formosa. Yes. They repaired the ship. It took them all day and all night, and then the following morning we left the dock.

T: Did the prisoners get off the ship, or were the repairs done with you still on board?

W: No. We stayed right on board.

T: How much of your time do you remember spending up on deck versus down in the hold?

W: I would say I spent about forty to fifty percent on top of deck.

T: And that was from what I hear you saying, that was something...you realized it was better up on deck than down below.

W: Yes. I was tough enough and smart enough to avoid getting pushed back in the hold.

T: How were the relations between the prisoners themselves in conditions like that? How were the men holding up?

W: Not too bad. I think after being on the battlefield and getting bombed every day and shelled every day, it was still better than facing those bombs and shells. That was a hell of a stretch. Didn't know if you were going to wake up the next morning or not.

T: In the holds of that ship, did the heat and the horrible conditions cause friction between prisoners? Disagreements or fights over anything?

W: No. We were all in the same boat and we all realized that. We had no choice. We had to make the best we could out of it. The situation.

T: I keep thinking that just must have been hard sometimes.

W: Oh, yes.

T: Even keeping your chin up like that. Well, the *Tottori Maru* on the 9 November, according to the historical record, pulls into Pusan in Korea. Do you remember being unloaded all at once from that ship?

W: Yes. Yes. As far as I can remember.

(1, B, 513)

T: Now, and just thinking geographically that Korea is much further north than the Philippines and it is November. How much had the weather changed?

W: Terrible. It was cold. Because we had tropical clothing. When we got up there that was a big problem for us.

T: Did they provide you with different clothes?

W: Yes. They did. It took a while but they did furnish us with overcoats and we still had tropical shirts and pants and stuff like that. They did furnish us with shoes. Of course, I didn't have any when I got off the train. The Japs took mine away.

T: From Pusan to Mukden?

W: Yes.

T: Took your shoes?

W: He took my shoes. Yes. You see I had those shrapnels on my heels and my shins and I couldn't wear shoes. I was carrying them. And the Japanese took them away from me. And they took away any jewelry that you had. You didn't get into that camp with anything. Any personal stuff.

T: At Mukden. Were you carrying anything besides the clothes on your back?

W: Yes. I had a packsack that had my canteen in there, and I had some extra...some khaki pants and a shirt. That was it. Canteen cup and a canteen. That they let us keep.

T: So that was the extent of your personal possessions when you arrived at Mukden.

W: Right.

T: When you got there, was the group of men from the ship still all together when you got off the train at Mukden?

W: Yes.

T: So they've moved you en masse on a train.

W: Right. We all got off there. We were all marched in a group to the prison camp. Of course, they marched us around town a little bit to show the Chinese the prisoners that they captured.

T: What was that like, being marched through town like that? How do you remember that?

W: The Chinamen didn't like it. They were our friends. They didn't like the Japanese. They didn't make a big issue out of that. The crowd was very small. Because a lot of them didn't want to see that. Of course, a lot of them were working. Because in China at that time you had to work or you didn't eat. Because if you didn't work at some company, there was no stores that gave out food. All our food was issued at the place of employment. And if you didn't work, you didn't eat.

T: That's how they got people to work.

W: Yes. We found that out in less than a week.

T: That marching through town. You say you don't remember being yelled at by the Chinese, or them throwing anything at you.

W: No. They were pretty quiet, the few that were out there. They didn't dare clap or anything. They were sympathizing with us. We worked with them. We worked with Chinese.

T: Yes. Let me ask about that. I would normally do this a little later, but since you bring it up, you had Chinese, would we call them co-workers, at the work detail you were on?

W: That's right. They were. They were. There was no Japanese working there. I worked at two different places.

(1, B, 563)

T: Yes. Well, let me ask about the first one of those. What was the first work detail you were on at Mukden?

W: The first one in Mukden was at MKK. That was the name of the company. When we first got there it was just the shell of the buildings and each building had two

cranes. Overhead cranes, and they were about a block long and maybe a little more than half a block, oh, about a half a block wide. The Japanese confiscated all kinds of machinery in their march throughout the East. All your better machines went to Japan, and the older ones were sent to Mukden. We had to dig foundations for these machines. Some of them were so old that to change the speed on a lathe you had two sets of gears. One lower and one upper. That's was how they made the change in your speed.

Well, when we were first there we had to dig foundations, we had to dig holes for foundations for these machines. What we did, we'd take these gears that were set aside by each machine. We took them and when we got a couple feet of concrete all ready in a mix, then we'd start throwing in parts of the machinery. Oh, if they ever caught us they would have shot every one of us.

T: Once those things get into the set concrete, they're gone forever.

W: Yes (*chuckles*). Anyways, that's what we did. And we threw anything that we could strip off of those machines, and it got so bad that the Japanese put guards and people with binoculars up in the rafters. Boy, I'll tell you, when we came to work one day—and they had white coveralls. Would you believe it? White coveralls. Up there in the rafters. When we got to work somebody spotted them. Early in the morning. Then they passed the word and then we would point at them. Of course, you aren't going to throw anything in the mix of concrete when they had field binoculars watching you. Anyway, that only lasted for one day, them watching us.

T: How long were you on this construction detail? How long did that last? This pouring, this working with these tools and the...

W: Didn't last very long. Couple of months. I got transferred out of there to the blacksmith shop, and that was all Chinese. We got to learn Chinese. We were teaching them English. Everything was a dirt floor. You'd start off, draw a picture of an airplane and we'd tell the Chinese that's an airplane. Then we'd draw a picture of a boat, same thing. We got to understand Chinese pretty well.

T: How long did you work at the blacksmith shop?

W: Oh, I would say about two months, three months. Then one day the Chinaman that we were working with, he had an anvil and a firepot—forge they call it. They had tools, tongs, that they would use to hold red-hot metal, and then in his other hand he would hold a shaping tool to shape whatever he wanted. Then they had two Americans with sledgehammers and we would hit this tool that he was holding on the red-hot iron. He would form whatever he wanted to shape. We would hit his tool. We were using sledgehammers all day long.

T: This sounds like tool making technology from the nineteen century.

W: Yes. That's what it was.

T: So literally, there's the fire heating the metal, and then with the hammers shaping the final thing.

W: Yes. And we had to swing the sledgehammers on the tool that was forming whatever he wanted. We did that ten hours a day.

T: And you did that for several months you say?

W: Yes. And then what happened, one day the Chinaman didn't show up to work. So they had a Japanese there taking his place. Well, he didn't understand English, so we—this guy was from Pueblo, Colorado, I think. He says, "Let's get this slant eyed bastard!"

(1, B, 638)

T: The other American.

W: He was another American.

T: So you were two Americans and this Japanese guy. The Japanese took the place of the Chinaman that day that didn't show up for work.

W: Right. When he got his red-hot material and he put it on the anvil and he got his tool and we were supposed to hit it, you know what we did? We didn't hit the tool like we did for the Chinaman. We hit it on an angle and it flew out of his hand and clipped him right in the ear. He started swearing at us in Japanese. One thing we did, we always acted dumb. All the prisoners. We acted dumb. We shrugged our shoulders. We didn't know what the hell he was talking about. So he made a second attempt, and the other guy did the same thing. He didn't hit the tool right. And the second time the other guy, the tool he was holding flew out of his hands and hit him in the chest. He threw the material back in the forge and he went to see the foreman of the shop.

It was quite a while. We were just standing there with nothing happening. Finally they came up there with this interpreter and the interpreter says...he wanted to know why we don't hit that tool for the Jap like we did the Chinaman. We acted dumb and said, "I don't know. He doesn't hold it like the Chinaman did." There was not much more said about it, but they pulled us out of that blacksmith shop and they put us outside. The interpreter told us, he said, "You two are denied the privilege of working inside. From now on you will be working outside."

There was nothing to do outside. But there was one truckload of rocks. Oh, six, eight, ten inches in diameter. We had to move those rocks clear across the campground and pile them at the other side of the campground. When we got them all there, we had to move them back. And that went on and on.

Then one day the Japanese guard came in. They did give us half an hour off for lunch, and they had a warming shack for us. One day a Jap guard came in. He

said, "Okay, everybody back to work." By that time we knew that four letter word in Japanese.

T: The word for...

W: The four letter word, f-u-c-k. We learned that word in Japanese. I remember it today. It's *skiviamara*. One guy popped off when the Jap came in there and ordered him out to work, and this guy hollered at him *skiviamara*. He got so damn mad he left his gun inside the shack. He went outside and got a two by four like and came in there swinging. We took that two by four away from him. Threw it out the door and we grabbed him and threw him out the door and then we threw his gun out. At that point of prisoner's life you didn't give a damn if you lived or not. Anyway, all this action was seen at the guard tower. They had these towers up on the corner and in between. And the guard on the tower saw that and the sirens went off. In ten minutes the Japs came in there with fixed bayonets and lined us up by the shack there.

T: How many of you?

W: I would say there was about thirty of us. Thirty, forty. They called us non-cooperatives. It was the crew that was working outside.

T: Moving the rocks.

W: So they lined us up there and they marched us back to camp. From that day on...well, the next morning they had all the men out to go to work and they separated us, thirty or forty or whatever it was that were working outside, and they wouldn't let us go back to work. So we were...what they did to us...we had to parade two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. All we had to do was parade inside the compound. And in between we were back in the barracks. We couldn't lay down and we had guards watching the doors. So we laid down and we only worked four hours a day. The others worked ten.

Well, the others found out about it and more and more of them were goofing up at work and joining our group. You wouldn't believe this, but within two months there was about three hundred non-cooperatives and the Japs were getting afraid of us because we'd sass them back when they gave us orders and stuff. So what they did, they separated us in groups of one hundred. One group of one hundred went to a textile mill and another group went to a...I can't remember what they were doing. But anyway, I was shipped to a sawmill.

(1, B, 733)

T: Can you estimate about when was this? I mean, I know you got there in November of '42. About what time are we talking now? How far along is this?

W: I would say about a year later.

T: So by a year later you've already worked in the blacksmith shop?

W: Yes. I worked in there maybe six months.

T: In the blacksmith shop?

W: Yes.

T: That's already in your past by now. By the fall of 1943 you've already had the blacksmith shop.

W: I would say that. Yes.

T: And just to keep this in my head then, this group of non-cooperatives got larger and larger and then, what, you estimate about a year after you got there, they split people into groups and you got sent on a work detail to a sawmill.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: This sawmill. Let me back up just a minute. That main camp at Mukden. Was that a main camp where the large group of prisoners was kept? All of you?

W: Yes. Until they separated us and pulled us out of the main camp and sent us out to what they called the side camp.

T: Now this main camp, was that just the group of Americans that you arrived with or were there other men there too?

W: There was British and Australians there too.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: ...were they there when you got there to the main camp at Mukden or did they come later?

W: They came later.

T: Were you guys the first group that got there?

W: Yes.

T: And then other men started to come in, in larger or smaller groups.

W: Right.

T: This main camp where you were first. Can you describe that? What kind of a place was that?

W: The first one or the second one?

T: The one where you spent the first year.

W: The first six months we spent in this bamboo place with dirt floors, and six months later...see, we arrived there on Armistice Day, November 11 [1942].

T: Yes. So it was winter.

W: Yes! And then we were at this other camp, the first camp, was kind of left unattended and it was run down. At nighttime in the wintertime when it snowed and it was windy, the wind would blow through the cracks on the wall and in the morning all you could see of the prisoners was the hole that you were breathing in. And you were all covered with snow. Your head and most of your body. Because your head was towards the wall.

T: So this building is providing minimal protection against the weather.

W: Yes. And the place was full of bedbugs. Oh, God! You couldn't sleep. Oh, gosh! We used to take our underwear and hang them outside and freeze them and we had some relief for about an hour, and they'd come back to life. That was our biggest problem. Bedbugs.

(2, A, 18)

T: So you remember them being a serious problem.

W: It was. Very serious.

T: For someone who hasn't had bedbugs, how do they bother you?

W: We couldn't sleep. You'd wake up and you had little spots all over your body that...they were eating on it, sucking your blood.

T: So you could feel them crawling on you and biting you while you were trying to sleep.

W: That's right. That's right.

T: Were there other bugs that you remember being a problem?

W: No. Not really.

T: So bedbugs were it. In the Philippines were there bug problems?

W: No. No.

T: So you had these bedbugs here. Were the bugs at this first facility at Mukden, or were they at all the facilities that you were at?

W: No. Just the first six months, in the first barracks we were in. The ones that the snow would come in and almost cover you up at night.

T: You got moved though to a different one you said, after six months.

W: That first six months in Mukden was terrible. But after that we moved into new buildings that were built for us.

T: Were they an improvement, from your memory?

W: Oh, terrific improvement. We had floors there and we had better, not bunks, but better platforms that we slept in. I don't remember if it was bunks or platforms. I think it was platforms. But it was one hundred percent better than the first six months.

T: The first six months, or even at the second location, together, what kind of food was provided?

W: When we first got there we had rice and, like I say, it was full of worms. Then they took away the rice and they fed us what they called maize. They fed us maize. It was a purple...it looked like rice, but it was purple in color and some of those people from down South in Oklahoma said that they grow that down there for chicken feed. Maize. It was purple in color and it...we didn't see rice since we moved into that second building.

T: You didn't see rice.

W: Never saw any more rice. It was all maize.

T: Anything else besides maize that you remember getting?

W: Sometimes we got some seafood. Plants that grew in the ocean. We had some of that now and then.

T: And how often were you fed there at Mukden? At the first or the second camp?

W: Twice a day.

T: And how was your health? I mean, since you've been moved a number of places now, how's your health holding up?

W: It was all right.

T: Was your back improving at all or just sort of...

W: I got that out of the way. After six months it kind of straightened up and I got out of that.

T: Now, after a year you were moved to a sawmill, and this is where, I think I hear you say, you were moved out of that main camp to a sub-camp?

(2, A, 55)

W: A side camp we called it.

T: A side camp. How many men went with you to this side camp? To the sawmill.

W: There was one hundred of us.

T: And how far away from the main camp was that?

W: I don't know. I would say a couple miles.

T: Did you walk there?

W: Yes.

T: And is that where you also had new accommodations? Is that where you slept as well?

W: Yes. It's hard to remember. But you know, the Japs didn't have much transportation up there because all their transporting equipment was in the Army, and what few vehicles they had, they didn't have gasoline. They had charcoal burners. They had furnaces and they had containers in the back of the vehicles where they carried charcoal with them.

T: Did you ever see any of those vehicles?

W: Oh, yes. There was only one...there was very few of them. They brought supplies into the camp. They had a furnace...like the trucks had a furnace on the back of the cab. Then they had a bin for charcoal. The charcoal was put into these furnaces and that's where they created gases that ran the motor. But they were real powerless. Very little power. Just enough to move the vehicle. They could not load the vehicle heavily because of lack of power.

T: Sure. But you don't remember taking one of those vehicles to the sawmill side camp.

W: No. I think we walked.

T: Talk about the kind of work that you did at the sawmill.

W: What we did was, the logs used to come in on the railroad. Flatcars. And believe me, they had some big logs. They could only get three of them on a flatcar. Two on the bottom, one on top. They were about maybe four feet in diameter. They came from the real boonies up there in northern Manchuria. Right around the city of Mukden there wasn't a tree in sight there for miles. But these logs came in on flatcars. Railroad. We had to unload the railroad cars and then we had to haul them on a little small rail cart to the sawmill. When we first got there they had three big saws that could cut these three foot, four foot logs. They had three big saws. They were band saws. The logs were too big for a circular saw. The band saw would cut this log. They'd cut the slab off and cut three by ten, three by twelve...

T: Like a plank?

W: Plank. But that same plank went to the saw behind the main saw and it went through a band saw that two Chinamen worked on. One would shove the—and make smaller cuts. Like one by eights, one by tens. Then it went to another one that cut it down to smaller. They had two and three smaller band saws that cut that—say four by ten or four by twelve. That was done by the other saws. Smaller saws.

T: What were you doing? Did you do different jobs here or did you do basically the same job every day?

W: I had to load the carriage that held the saw that went through the mill. See, there was a carriage on the track and the big log went...I used to strap them down on the carriage and it went through the saw and made its cut. Then it would come back and I would have to turn it over when the Chinamen wanted it turned over. Then they made other cuts on it. The first cut or the first two cuts, that was turned down on the carriage and then they cut some more.

T: How many Chinese were working at this facility with you?

W: I would say about a dozen [Chinese were working at this facility].

T: And you worked, it sounds like, side by side with these people.

W: Oh, yes. We got along like brothers.

T: And did you slowly learn to communicate with each other by them learning English or you learning Chinese?

W: Yes. Both. We learned some Chinese and they learned English. And we could get our message across pretty good. After three years.

T: I imagine you would.

W: Yes.

T: So you picked up Chinese and sort of learned to communicate with each other.

W: Right.

T: At the side camp, what kind of accommodations did they provide for the about hundred or so men that moved there?

W: They weren't the best. They were bunks...oh, they weren't bunks. They were platforms. They had lower platforms and then they had upper platforms above the lower ones.

T: Did you all stay in one large building? All the prisoners in one location?

W: Yes.

T: And what kind of a building was that?

W: Oh, it was brick. Because there's so much brick there. They have very little wood. All the buildings were brick. Even in town. I hadn't seen a wood building in the whole town.

T: You mentioned not many trees around the town.

W: There weren't any trees. They got those way up north someplace. They came in on railroad cars. But there were no trees around that city at all.

T: How long did you stay at the sawmill facility?

W: A good two years.

T: So that was your longest single stop as a POW, was this location.

W: Right. That's where I ended up when the Russians came into Mukden. That's where we ended up. At the sawmill.

T: Did the hundred or so men that you remember going there with you, did that number stay pretty much the same?

W: Yes. Pretty much.

T: Did guys leave and other guys come, or was it essentially the same group?

W: The same group.

T: And did guys die at that facility, or had that pretty much stabilized?

W: At the side camp?

T: Yes.

W: Not very many. Not very many.

T: So it sounds like that was something that happened earlier in the Philippines but by now has pretty much stopped.

(2, A, 138)

W: Yes. They got back to the health pretty good.

T: Did you have, among the guys you were there a couple of years with, were there several, one prisoner or more than one, who you consider was a better friend to you than anybody else?

W: Yes. I had three or four close friends and we communicated after we were back in the States. And they all died. Only one survived. That's the one in New York, Rochester, New York. He's still kicking. All the other buddies that I worked close with and bunked with, they died. I'm eighty-five years old.

T: You were born 1919. That's right. The guys that you were friends with there, in a situation like that, how can friends help each other on a day to day basis?

W: What they couldn't do, we helped them do it.

T: For example?

W: At first they were weak and they couldn't do any real work. We helped them go to the bathhouse. We helped them fix their bunks. And food. We brought them food. Then when it got too bad, they just passed away.

T: Did that happen in Mukden, or that situation mostly in the Philippines?

W: That happened early when we were first taken prisoner. When we were in Mukden, like I said, they chose all the strongest men. They lined us up and chose all the stronger looking men and those were the ones that got shipped out.

T: Right. Were friends as important in Mukden as they were in the Philippines?

W: Yes. Yes. We were a close-knit, like a family. We all helped each other.

T: The larger group or more the smaller groups of men?

W: Smaller groups.

T: Do you remember working every day up there at the sawmill facility or were there days off as it were?

W: We got one day off a week.

T: With a day off, what did you typically do?

W: The only thing we could do was wash our bedding and wash our clothes. Just relax for that day. Then it was back to work ten hours a day.

T: So it sounds like there was very much a routine of go to work, do certain work, and a day off a week.

W: Yes. You came back from work in the evening. It was six thirty or so. Then by the time you had your evening meal you hit the sack. Because we didn't get fed that good and we needed that sleep.

T: The Japanese guards there at the sawmill facility, were there Japanese around there?

W: Yes. There were Japanese at the camp, but they were in separate quarters and they escorted us to and from work.

T: So you went from the side camp to the sawmill to work every day and then back?

W: That's right.

T: How far was that? Was that a walking distance?

W: Yes. It was about a half a mile.

T: So the Japanese escorted you, it sounds like.

(2, A, 183)

W: That's right and they escorted us back.

T: Did they stay at the sawmill facility to oversee at all?

W: No. Once we got at the sawmill, that was enclosed in a twelve foot high brick wall. They [the Japanese guards] were gone. But in that compound was Japanese living quarters. There was a few of them that ran the mill. Over the Chinese and over us. There was, I would say, about four families living in there.

T: Not necessarily soldiers, but civilian Japanese?

W: Right. Right.

T: Did you ever come into contact with them or were they more in the distance there?

W: The Japanese?

T: Yes.

W: We were in contact with them. They were around to swing their bayonets at us. They were around. Within reach all the time.

T: And the civilians in the sawmill there...

W: They were unarmed.

T: Did you ever see those people or have anything to do with them?

W: Like I said, there was a living quarters there. Once in a while the ladies would have...they used to wash clothes and hang them outside on the clothesline. We would be working right in that area. They used to, once in a while, make these rice cakes, and they would put them on the logs and make sure we saw them. You know, when they came out to hang clothes. The ladies, they kind of felt sorry for us. And they'd slip us some stuff like that they made. Of course, they didn't have a hell of a lot either, so they couldn't give you much.

T: It's pretty decent of them though.

W: It was. Yes. And they would put these rice cakes out. Maybe once a week. We're all looking forward to it. When we saw the lady come out with that package we knew damn well what it was, and everybody fought to get it (*chuckles*).

T: So there wasn't necessarily one for everyone.

W: No. Just if you were working in that area, you were the one that got it.

T: So that was just chance. If you happened to be...

W: Yes. Yes.

T: I wondered how that was worked out with not enough to go around. Mukden on the map is pretty far from everything.

W: Yes.

T: How was it possible for you, let's say at that sawmill facility, to get any news of the outside world? Say of how the war was going?

W: No. The only news we got was [from] the Chinese men that we worked with and that was very, very little until the Americans were making a good march towards Japan. Then the Chinese were notified and had a pretty good idea because they were left in the dark too about what was going on. But when the war was coming close to the end they figured out what was going on and they would tell us.

T: So for a long time, it sounds like, you didn't have much news at all of how the war was going.

W: No. We didn't have any news until the last couple of months.

T: And by that time it was going quite badly for the Japanese.

(2, A, 227)

W: Yes. Going pretty bad for them.

T: Did you ever see the war? Did you ever, for example, see American planes come over Mukden?

W: One time. They came over on the anniversary date of the war. That was December 8. Hawaii was the seventh, but where I was there was the International Date Line. On December 8, 1944, American B-29s came in from China and they blew the hell out of that railroad yard. Our camp was right next to this railroad, and it was a big railroad.

T: This is the railroad that's bringing in the logs for the sawmill.

W: Yes. But not only that, but that was centrally located from the north and south. Korea and Manchuria. It was a big railroad yard there where they kind of branched out to different cities. These B-29s came in there. I don't remember how many there were. One bomb dropped in the prison camp, and it killed sixteen POWs.

T: From your sawmill group.

W: We weren't at the sawmill at that time.

T: You weren't at the sawmill.

W: No.

T: You were at the side camp.

W: This happened before I went to the side camp. The dates I'm kind of mixed up. But I don't know why we were at that camp. But anyway, they killed about seventeen or eighteen POWs. I was at the main camp at that time.

T: How do you remember that raid by the B-29s from being on the ground? What was that like?

W: It was joyful. To see them. We knew that the American forces are getting close.

T: In a sense, that's a news report for you of how the war is going.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: Talk about being on the ground in a B-29 bombing raid. That's not something that happens to everyone either.

W: No. We didn't expect the bombs to land in the camp, but we sure could hear them next door. Our camp was right next to the railroad. Boy, they were sure blasting away. They made a couple of passes. The first formation dropped their load and that's when one of them landed in the camp. We were all outside cheering. They came back the second time and dropped another load of bombs. Then they disappeared.

T: So you could see them up there or just hear them?

W: Yes. They were low.

T: So you could see them as well as feel the bombs coming around you.

W: Right. We saw them coming in and we saw them going out after they dropped their bombs.

T: So that was one of the few news reports that you had that the Americans were getting closer to Japan.

W: Correct. And one of those bombers got shot down. The crew survived. They parachuted and they were taken POWs, but we had no communication with them.

T: Were they in the same camp as you?

W: Same camp, but they were isolated from us. They were put outside the wall where we couldn't communicate with them.

T: So you knew they were there but you couldn't communicate with them.

(2, A, 281)

W: Yes. Because the Chinese told us about it. He said one of the planes was shot down and the crew are prisoners right outside of our wall. Different enclosure.

T: So they never went on work details with you or anything?

W: No. No. They were isolated completely. They didn't go to work.

T: Did you ever see those guys once the camp was liberated?

W: I don't think so. But they mixed in with us, but I didn't see any of them.

T: So after that plane was shot down you knew they were out there, but no contact.

W: Right.

T: As a POW, as you know the war was going poorly for the Japanese and better for the Americans, were you concerned what would happen to you or to the rest of the POWs if the Japanese lost the war?

W: We were threatened that we were going to be shot.

T: So they told you that?

W: They told us that. Some of those guards that were—they changed guards. I forgot to tell you. They changed guards every six months.

T: So you saw different teams of Japanese guards.

W: Yes. Yes. They changed guards every six months so they wouldn't get too friendly with us.

T: Was it the Japanese guards that told you that you were to be killed if they lost?

W: Yes. They said we'd never see home again. He said if the war gets worse, we were all going to be shot. Against the wall.

T: So they made specific threats that you remember about what was going to happen if they were to lose.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: Well, the guards. You mentioned the guards changed. You didn't always have the same people.

W: No. They were pretty like the guards and the officer that controlled that guard was above them, they would serve six months with us and then they would be gone to another camp for six months. Six months later that first group would be right back with us.

T: So you saw some people, some guards, more than once.

W: Yes.

T: Was there any difference in treatment that you remember as the war went on from the Japanese? Did their treatment improve or get worse or was it about the same?

W: The treatment was very different as the Japs were losing the war. They weren't beating us up like they did at the beginning.

T: So the level of physical abuse went down.

W: It went down quite a bit.

T: What did you make of that?

W: We figured something was coming. We figured the Americans were getting closer. The Japs came to the point the last six months or so, there was very few beatings.

T: So in a sense, you could almost read that like a news report too.

W: Yes. One thing I'd like to bring to mind. When you remember we threw the Japanese out of the warming shack?

(2, A, 340)

T: Yes. Guard. Yes.

W: I forgot to tell you, when they marched us back to camp it was about one fifteen. With fixed bayonets. I forgot to tell you. It was twenty-eight below zero that day, and they made us stand at attention until midnight.

T: So between ten and eleven hours?

W: We had to stand at attention, and if they caught you as much as moving your foot to get circulation they came by with a bayonet scabbard or the butt of the rifle and they whacked you over the ears. It was twenty-eight below centigrade.

T: Minus twenty-eight centigrade, which is still below zero Fahrenheit.

W: Yes. Yes. We had to stand at attention. That was one of the tortures that we had. That was the worst one. There was others in the camp, but that was only for a couple hours. That one there was from one fifteen until midnight.

T: In Mukden, were you ever physically assaulted by the Japanese? Hit or knocked around for anything?

W: Oh, yes. I can remember one instance working at the sawmill. Every day we'd throw wood over the fence to the Chinese because they didn't have anything to cook their meals on. They would pick grass and leaves, anything, to cook their meals. It was a godsend when we got there. We would throw the slab wood that was parked right next to the fence. We would throw that over to the Chinese.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.

T: They must not have been watching that closely if you were able to throw wood over the side.

W: This was noon hour. Because otherwise we had to be working. But this one day I was throwing wood over and the Japanese sneaked up behind me. I was busy talking with the Japanese and I didn't see that guard coming. He came up the pile and he hit me over the head with the butt of his rifle. At that point I turned around and I hit him so hard right in the jaw and he went rolling down the pile of wood, and then I swore at him in Japanese and I picked up his rifle and I threw it at him. We were at the point that we didn't give a damn if we lived or not. This happened.

T: When did that happen? How close to the end of the war was this?

W: Pretty close. It was pretty close to the end of the war, and I threw the gun back up at him. He picked up his gun and another Jap came over there. They lined us all up and marched us back to camp. That was the noon hour. There was about twenty-eight of us or so working at the sawmill. They marched us all back to camp and they thought I was going to get the firing squad that evening.

T: Did you think so too?

W: Yes. Yes. You know, came evening meal, nothing going on. No Japs around. Nothing. Everything was quiet. Nobody in the kitchen. We opened the gate and we looked up and down the street. All you saw was a dog now and then. And nobody. Not even the Chinese out there. We couldn't figure out what the hell was going on. So we slowly started exiting the camp, getting out of there. We were walking down the street trying to find out what the heck was going on. The first place we hit was a brewery. And there was a Chinaman in the ground there at the brewery. So we loaded up cases of beer on his rickshaw and we went back to camp with all that beer.

T: Where were the Japanese?

W: We didn't know. They were gone. It got dark and we had all this beer in the camp and not a Jap, not a Chinaman, not a Japanese, not even a Russian in sight. So we ended up drinking that beer in the camp. There was nothing to eat. The next morning when we got up we started roaming around and then we saw the Russians on the street.

(2, B, 416)

T: So it was really that sudden that the war ended for you.

W: That's right. What happened was the next day when the Russians were there we noticed that these women that lived in that compound, the Japanese, they all deserted the women. Then the women, some hid under the floor in the quarters and the group of women, of women and kids, were in a root cellar that they had where they kept their food. There was no refrigeration. They kept their food in the root cellar. We discovered that. A guy from Pennsylvania and I walked back into the camp the following day. The women were praying for safety. We felt sorry for them because they were...those were the women that would give us those cakes.

T: So here are the same Japanese civilians.

W: Yes. They were the same civilians that lived in the compound there. So what we did, we got a rickshaw and we told them to get their personal belongings, some pots and pans and things to cook, and we brought them about two, three blocks to a refugee center where all the men were concentrated.

T: The Japanese men.

W: Yes. They left the families and they all concentrated in that—this was a lumberyard where they stored logs and cut lumber. They took refuge there. So we brought these women and kids there. There was two women in the root cellar and about six kids. We got the belongings with some blankets and stuff. Pots and pans.

We loaded down this rickshaw and me and this guy from Pennsylvania, we were pulling the cart and they were following us to this refugee center. A Russian was two blocks up the street shooting at us. Because this was almost dark. So I got fired on by the Russians. I'll tell you....I'll come to that later.

T: The end of the war for you here has come very suddenly in August of 1945.

W: Yes.

T: The Japanese, from what you say, kind of melted away—the guards.

W: Yes.

T: They were just gone from one day to the next.

W: All the Japanese were. Disappeared.

T: Did you have interaction with the Russians? They are, I guess, are they your liberators?

W: Did we have any doings with them?

T: Yes. Because the Japanese have gone. Did the Russians come to your camp?

W: No. They were on the streets. They didn't come to our camp. We were already dispersed and all over the damn town. I can remember downtown. We got downtown, and we were drinking vodka with the Russians. The Russians thought we were American officers, and when they found out that we were enlisted men we were in trouble. We jumped out of the building, second story building, right on concrete and got the hell out of there.

T: Did the Russians take care of you at all once they overran the area?

W: No. After this incident we all went back to the main camp because our life was in danger.

T: Did you feel that?

W: Oh, yes. Because the Chinese, they confiscated all the Japanese arms they could get their hands on and they were on top of the buildings downtown and they were shooting at anything that moved. We were there trying to get back to the main camp and we got caught in the crossfire there and we found a space between two buildings. There was nothing but dirt between the two. So we spent the night there. Me and this guy from Pennsylvania.

T: What was his name?

(2, B, 459)

W: I can't remember. I can't remember his name.

T: Just the two of you. In a sense, it sounds like anarchy there in Mukden.

W: Yes. You didn't know who was shooting at who. The Russians were down the road with artillery shooting at the top of the buildings, and the Chinese were shooting at everything that moved down below. Now, I don't know if they didn't like the Russians or what the hell was going on. We got caught in that situation. We spent the night...you know, I'm lucky I'm alive.

T: You spent what sounds like an anxious night and, ironically, the safest place to be is the camp.

W: Yes. But we were away from camp. I don't know. We got caught downtown. I don't know where we were going and why. I don't know that.

T: How long did you stay in the camp before Americans arrived there? Or did Americans arrive there?

W: Oh, yes. They came in...it wasn't very long. A week later they were there. Making arrangements to transport us out of there.

T: Did the Americans arrive by air or by land? How did they come?

W: I don't know.

T: Suddenly they were just at the camp in uniform.

W: Yes.

T: How did you get out of the camp there?

W: How did I get out?

T: Yes. I mean, the prisoners were all taken out. Were you taken out by plane or by train?

W: Train.

T: Back to Pusan?

W: I think we had to walk to the train. Then we went down to...it was Port Arthur. It's Pusan now.

T: Port Arthur. So you went to Port Arthur on the train and then from there you were taken on a ship?

W: I was on a hospital ship and then some of them were on destroyers.

T: You, personally, were on a hospital ship or destroyer?

W: I was on a hospital ship. We left Port Arthur, Korea, and we were headed for Okinawa. We hit that big...cyclone, what do you call them?

T: Typhoon, I think.

W: Yes. Yes. We hit that and boy, I'll tell you, there was a lot of ships sunk there. You didn't read about that or hear about that back in the States. But there was a lot of destroyers and ships that went under, and we were just lucky. We were capsizing at forty-five degrees and the captain of that ship said we were very, very lucky. He said that ship would have capsized at forty-seven degrees.

T: So the seas were...

W: What happened there, see, we were already on the boat headed for Okinawa and we were ready to unload the ship at Okinawa. But we had to go back. We were still on the ship but our officers came back on the ship and we had to go ride the high seas. Then when it was all over with, then we flew from... I'll tell you how bad it was. The Air Force, they cabled all their planes down to the ground and they had to get into the planes and run the engines at a pretty good throttle.

T: To hold them in place?

(2, B, 497)

W: Yes. On the ground to keep them from that typhoon...raise the plane and destroying them. Tearing them away. That's how bad it was. When that was all over with at Okinawa and then we got back on the planes and they flew us to the Philippines. From the Philippines we went by boat, I think. I can't remember. That's one trip that's blank in my mind. How I got from the Philippines back to California. But I do remember they doped us up. They doped us up and we came to when we were going under the Golden Gate Bridge (*chuckles*).

T: So you remember arriving back in the States there.

W: The only thing I can remember is going under the Golden Gate Bridge. But I don't remember anything from the Philippines to California.

T: When you got back to the States, did they keep you in a hospital in California there for a while?

W: Yes. Yes. They examined us and gave us shots. We were there for...I don't remember how long. But then we were shipped out of there on a hospital train to the hospital nearest our home.

T: Which one was that for you?

W: I was in Clinton, Iowa.

T: Clinton, Iowa. Right.

W: It's right on the Mississippi River.

T: Yes.

W: So I was there until my discharge.

T: So you spent a number of months there. Were you at any other hospital or medical facilities before you were discharged?

W: No.

T: Just at Clinton, Iowa.

W: Yes.

T: After you got to Clinton, Iowa, how soon was it before you saw any of your brothers...your brother or your sisters or your folks?

W: They gave us an examination, and about a week after that those that weren't too sick, they gave us a furlough. So we went home and saw our parents and kids. Yes. That was just before Christmas.

T: So December '45.

W: Then we were only allowed one week, I think. Leave. And we had to be back. We had to spend Christmas there. Sometime in January or February they let me go home. But I was still under the Army. Then I had to go to Chicago, Fort Sheridan, to get my discharge.

T: And what month was that? Your discharge.

W: I think it was April or May. Somewhere in there.

T: When you first got a chance to see your—and were your folks still both alive at this time? Your parents were still alive?

W: Yes.

T: When you saw your folks or your brother or your sisters, how much did they ask you about your POW experience?

W: Not very much. Not very much. Because we never talked about it. They never asked questions. I can remember I left Fort Snelling, I think. I was there and got transportation. Had to make a transfer there somewhere. But I ran into a preacher. A minister. We were on the same train from Minneapolis to Hibbing. We got acquainted on the train. He asked me where I was going, and I said Hibbing, and he asked me all about Hibbing because he never was up here. And he told me that he was going to this certain church. We rode together the rest of the trip. I don't know where this started, but we were together for the rest of the trip. When we got to Hibbing it was about nine o'clock in the evening. Well, I got off there and everything was so different, and I went downtown to the taverns there and wouldn't you believe it, some of my neighbor buddies were there and oh, God! What a celebration. When the joints closed, they took me home. They hired a cab and they took me home.

(2, B, 553)

T: Because your folks lived on the outskirts of town, right?

W: Yes. We lived about two and a half miles west of the little mining community there.

T: Which one?

W: About five hundred people. They called it Leetonia.

T: So you got to see your folks that same night, but after seeing some friends of yours.

W: I got home about two in the morning and the cab driver was blowing the horn there. Then the guys I was drinking with, celebrating with, they stayed there until the lights came on in the house. Then I left the cab and went in the house and oh! My mother went wild (*chuckles*). Never thought to see me.

T: Did she know you were coming?

W: No.

T: So it was a total...

W: They knew I was coming, but they didn't know what day or what time.

T: What do you remember about being home that period with them the first time?

W: I can remember my dad going to my sister's house, which was a block away. She was married and had kids. They came over. Then the neighbors came over the next day. It was quite a get together. All my old friends. They hadn't seen me for five years. There was quite a reunion.

T: How much did what you had been through as a POW come up when people were there seeing you?

W: How much did...

T: How much did they ask you about being a POW? Let's face it. That's where you had been for three and a half years.

W: They asked quite a bit. Quite a few questions and I answered them.

T: When you think back on it now, do you feel you answered people honestly with detail or did you give them kind of the easy version?

W: I gave them the story as it happened. As things happened. Exactly how it happened. I didn't bypass anything that did come to mind.

T: Did your parents seem to be interested in details of what had happened to you as a POW?

W: No. They didn't want to bring up that. Very seldom we talked about that. My life as a POW. And all through life. I worked in transportation, Schuback Transportation Company, and then I left there and I went to work for the school and I worked for the school eight years before they knew I was a POW.

T: You're kidding me. The school system in Hibbing there?

W: Right. And after that eight years and they found out I was a POW, oh my God! I was getting calls from the different organizations like the Lions Club and the school wanted me to talk about the POW life in front of students and I refused. All of it. This is the first interview that I let loose.

T: Well, I'll thank you for that then. On the record. How come you said no all those years when people asked you?

W: When they asked me about prison life?

T: Yes. I mean, they asked you to speak and you said no. How come you didn't want to do that?

(2, B, 599)

W: Because I break up in tears.

T: So doing it on the telephone isn't such a bad thing.

W: Well, a few of them are coming now and then.

T: So it was something that although people wanted to know about over the years, you didn't want to talk about really.

W: That's true. I didn't want to talk about it.

T: And these are questions we ask of everyone about talking about it after the war, so this is just our standard stuff. When you got married, 1946, how much did your wife, Margaret, know about you being a POW?

W: Not too much. Not too much.

T: Did she know you were a POW?

W: Yes. That she knew. I never talked about it in the family.

T: Was that more that your wife or your family didn't ask, or you didn't tell?

W: I don't think they wanted me to be reminded of that.

T: So they avoided asking you about it, you feel.

W: That's right. And my wife the same way. She never brought things up. If I told her something, she'd listen, but she never brought it up.

T: How about your boys? What years were they born?

W: One was born in '47 and one was born in '49.

T: Now kids as they're growing up, kids sometimes just ask things. Did your boys ask as they were growing up?

W: Ask about it?

T: Yes.

W: No. No.

T: Did they know?

W: I think they did. I think they did. Because when they were growing up and getting teenagers I was getting magazines and stuff—POW magazines.

T: So they could put two and two together and realize that was why you were getting those things?

W: Right.

T: But the details of your story wasn't something that they knew about.

W: Yes.

T: What do they know now as men of almost sixty years old?

W: What do they know now?

T: Yes.

W: Not much (*chuckles*). Once in a while something will come up that will bring a little story about the camp. But not too much.

T: Continuing on the post-war. After you were released and you were no longer a POW, how often did you have dreams or even nightmares about things from your POW time?

W: Quite often. Quite often. Five days out of seven. It went for years. It's just about the last ten years it kind of...maybe, three, four times a year I'll get into that situation.

(2, B, 640)

T: So you remember that for many years it was pretty regular.

W: Yes.

T: When you had dreams or nightmares, which POW time memories or images showed up in your dreams?

W: Beatings mostly. Beatings.

T: Beatings that you got, or beatings that you witnessed.

W: Both. Beatings I took and beatings my serviceman buddies did. You never knew when you were going to get beat up for no reason at all.

T: Was there a dream that you had more than once or regularly?

W: About the beatings?

T: Yes.

W: I still have them. Maybe three, four of them. Five maybe a year.

T: Was there a certain dream that you had more than once?

W: They were all different.

T: So there's variety. You don't have the same...there's not one dream or two dreams that you have on a regular basis.

W: No.

T: Are there Japanese in the dreams? Real people that you remember?

W: Yes. Those are the ones that come to mind when you dream of the beatings and stuff like that.

T: So you see real Japanese faces? Faces that you remember.

W: Yes.

T: Are they people that had names? You know who they were?

W: No. I knew them at the time. Their names. Nicknames. We all had nicknames for them. We had one captain, Japanese captain. We named him "The Bull." Then they had "Bonehead." And there were some that were pretty good. We had names for them too.

T: Are these the guys that showed up in your dreams? Some of them?

W: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Quite a bit. Quite a few. In the past. But lately, not so much.

T: So luckily those have become much less frequent.

W: Yes.

T: Have you had help from your Veterans Administration? Dealing with your POW experience? Do they have support groups or psychologists that you've had help from?

W: Yes. I used to go down to the Vets Hospital quite often in the past.

T: Which VA do you generally use?

W: Pardon?

T: Do you use St. Cloud or down to the Twin Cities, or which one?

W: Twin Cities.

T: Wow. You come a long way then.

W: Yes. I don't know. I would get into discussions about that now and then. They were curious to know what went on in the prison camps, you know. You didn't get much news over there.

T: When you're at the VA, did you find it easy to talk to the counselors or the people at the VA about what you had been through as a POW?

W: Yes. Very easy.

T: What made them easy to talk to, as opposed to other people?

(2, B, 692)

W: I don't know. They were briefed on the...like Corregidor. They knew topside and the bottom. They knew Monkey Point. It was just like another veteran. It was easy to talk to.

T: So because they knew the situation and the circumstances, it was easier to share details with them.

W: Right.

T: Do you still visit the VA to talk about things or not anymore?

W: Not anymore. When I go down there it's for physical treatment or something like that.

T: Do you have one hundred percent disability from your VA?

W: I just got it two years ago.

T: And what percentage were you in the first years after the war?

W: The first year I was one hundred percent. But it was one hundred dollars a month then. Then I had to, every year I had to go down to Fort Snelling and get reevaluated for that pension. It was small. Twenty-seven percent, thirty percent. Every year it increased a little bit. Finally, a couple years ago the Congress passed some better benefits for us, and I was called down to Fort Snelling when these new laws came in and I was there for three days. They were examining me. Everything you can imagine. Two months later I was home and I got the letter notifying me I got one hundred percent.

T: So to recap, it sounds like after the war you had one hundred percent and then it went down and then slowly went back up again?

W: Yes. Then it slowly started going up.

T: And now you have one hundred percent again.

W: Yes.

T: One of the last things I want to ask you is when you think about the years you spent as a POW, how would you describe the way or the ways that that changed you as a person do you think?

W: When I got home I got to appreciate the freedom that the people got in this country. That was number one on the list. I could do what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it, or how I wanted to do it. You can't get that in the foreign countries. They tell you when to wear your winter underwear and how long you can wear it and if you get caught wearing it beyond the take-off date, they took it away from you. And the food. I can eat and buy what I want. Over there it's only one menu and you don't buy it and get as much as you want. That is rationed to you at the price of your workplace. It's things like that that I really appreciated when I first came back.

T: Would you say you had a...what kind of an adjustment did you have to coming back to civilian life? Did you have any difficulties making that transition?

W: None at all, except eating. I couldn't eat what I wanted to. Like I got hold of a Snicker's bar when I first got liberated. The Red Cross gave us a Snicker's bar...

End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A begins at counter 000.

W: ...about half of it and I to put it away and eat the rest of it later on that day. Our stomachs were shrunk so bad.

T: When you got out of the service and were a civilian again in 1946, what adjustment problems did you have after all those years?

W: I didn't have any problem at all. Not that I know of.

T: Some guys I've talked to have mentioned that they, for example, they drank more than they had in the past or they had a tough time making a transition to work.

W: No. I went out and raised hell and drank and enjoyed life for a while there, but that was cut short because I never did care that much for drinking. I got married and that put the end to that.

T: So you remember a brief period of what you call raising hell, of kind of almost getting things out of your system?

W: No. It didn't bother me at all.

T: So you remember the transition to civilian life being a fairly comfortable one.

W: Yes. No problem.

T: Well, up until now I've been doing all the questions. This is a good time for you to add anything that we may have missed or that you want to make sure gets on the record. So at this point I'll turn it over to you.

W: We start off with the *Tottori Maru*?

T: Yes.

W: I told you about the two torpedoes fired at us.

T: Yes.

W: And it was a long voyage and a dirty hold full of manure, gunky manure and it was a pleasure to get out of that boat and onto a railroad car and shipped up north to Manchuria.

T: Boy, you made that clear that the ship, from your perspective, was one of the worst parts of the whole deal.

W: Right. That was terrible. They called it the hell ships. I don't know if anybody told you that.

T: Yes. For good reasons.

W: It was a hell ship. I was in pretty good shape physically. I would say one in one hundred that was in real good shape. Like I said, I told you about throwing that guard out of the guardhouse and stuff like that.

T: Yes.

W: There isn't much more to say except the Japanese were great in torturing us. Making us stand at attention in cold weather and beating the hell out of us and stuff like that and sometimes even denying you food. But I think we pretty much covered it.

T: Then let me thank you again for taking time to do this interview for the POW Oral History Project. I'll turn the recorder off.

END OF INTERVIEW